

**First Impressions
Of
St. Mary's WV
BY
Caldwell/Noble County, OH**

Sponsored in Noble County by:
Ohio State University Extension, Community Development
Noble County Chamber of Commerce
Leadership Noble

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Profile of team:

Recording Participants:

David Cater, Director, Noble County Travel and Toprism Program, Age-40's
Cindy Fogle, Cashier, Farmer's and Merchant's Bank/Leadership Noble Participant
Age-40's
Jerry Russell, Retired Superintendent of Noble Local School District, Age-60's
Misty Wells, Employment Services Interviewer, Noble County Dept. of Jobs and Family
Services/Leadership Noble Participant, Age-20'

Non-Recording Participant:

Mike Lloyd, Extension Agent, Community Development, OSU Extension, Noble
County, Age-40's

Weather

Mostly cloudy, heavy, non-continuous rain showers in both early morning and late
afternoon. Temperature in the 70's cooling to the 60's.

Date of Visit and Time Spent:

Tuesday, May **22,2001**. Arrived in St. Mary's at **10:15** a.m. Departed at **3:15** p.m.

As you approach the community- .- .- .-

I. What was my perception before visiting? What did I expect?

- O* Clean town... Small self-contained community, proud community.
- O* That we had a lot of similarities to be a “sister community.” No expectations.
- O* I have never been to St. Mary’s before today.
- O* Never been there.

II. The “five minute” impression.

Take one drive through the community without stopping. As you exit the community, pull over to the side of the road and write down what you felt about the town with only this quick look. Do this in silence, don’t talk with the others in your group for this part.

- O* For the most part, town is clean and neat appearing. Businesses are well marked (ie...car lots have flags, good markings). Signs of renovation mixed with older buildings. Business district mixed... (some old, some remodeled, little new?(*will look harder on foot*)). Need a concerted effort. Four lane access good, but, you could miss the business area if you aren’t looking for it.
- O* The Plant and at least paint the tanks. Antiques Collectibles - were eye sores coming into town. Looked like they have a little bit of everything...banks, motel, fast food & regular restaurants, shops, gas stations, funeral home, car dealer, family dollar, hardware - basic stores & needs for a small community or any community for that matter. Thought the general appearance was good as we drove through town - the media was neat - nice trees-looks like a clean town I liked the larger yard area in front of the homes along the highway - houses weren’t setting right on the street. Homes were well kept and looked nice.
- ☆* The Refinery on the right when we first entered St. Mary’s was an eye sore. As we came on in to the town there are several businesses and restaurants very similar to Caldwell. Businesses in town were comparable - car lots, banks, Family Dollar. Downtown area could use some revitalization. The train that runs down the middle of the street was an interesting attraction. Most of the homes were nice driving through the town.
- O* Beautiful and dramatic entrance to West Virginia at St. Mary’s via Hiram-Carpenter Bridge. Beautiful “Gateway”. Then the old oil refinery pulled the beauty way down.

Just some paint on the two big tanks near the road would help. Then the town provided great beauty once again along main road. Beautiful views of trees and landscape. Downtown area had a couple vacant stores and one antique & collectible place that looked bad and almost came out on the road. Road leading to courthouse was eye catching. Railroad track down middle of road - very unique and surprising. Several nice shops & stores.

The old refinery does hold great potential - just haven't thought of how.

Idea: paint some of the tanks with info or murals about the area (tank - Welcome to St. Mary's) use refinery as an area of history, tours, walking trails to incorporate a part of history - chair lift to take people to second level of tanks on the hill - another park there with overlook, picnic tables, observatory on top of a tank.

Make it a fascinating area rather than eyesore - don't always think only of how to tear it down but rather how to make it safe and capitalize on its mystique and fascination.

1. (b) Driving...evaluate other business areas.

- ⊗ Downtown area appears old for the most part...it is ready for your planned upgrade. Larger business signs are needed, maybe consider similar sign styles.
- ⊗ Side streets and roads have several shops. Stores - some closed or run-down may be revitalized with Middle Island Park and other opportunities. Authentic street lights could be put in with downtown revitalization project and put wires underground - work on nice store fronts and signs to improve area.

2. Driving...comments on residential:

- 4** Rt. 2 South and North have some very attractive homes ... while mixed in value, most are clean and attractive (a few need improved). Rt **16** - homes give nice appearance to community.
- ⊗ Very nice. Most of the homes, yards etc. were very well kept - even the trailers.
- ⊗ Very nice residential areas - a few homes that need a lot of work. Most had a decent size yard.

3. Driving...comments on:

a. street signs

- ⊗ Good street signs, need more special signs to find library, island, etc.
- ⊗ National school of excellence - sign grown over.
- ⊗ Visible

b. traffic patterns/street conditions

- 0** New 4 lane is great... need some new signs to find streets to business area.
- 4** Nice four-lane road.

As you "visit" around town:

You now divide into your teams: one team will drive the town while the other members will hoof it and start visiting businesses, city hall, etc. After lunch the teams will switch roles so everyone has a chance to drive the community and to personally walk into stores and visit with people.

III. Driving Tour Questions:

...evaluate EACH entrance.

Go about ½ - 1 mile out each road and return. List each road (61 North, etc.) And list positive and negatives for each.

- 4 Route 16 - some trash, wonder if it's mowed? Homes were nice.
N. Rt 2 - Very nice - pretty through there - like the scenery! Plant trees to hide trailer area - highway a little rough.
Rt. 2 South - Plant - tanks need painted or a wall or - have high school kids paint murals on them or something or plant huge trees. Road/highway is better.
- ⊗ Rt. 16 - All signs are visible, scenic drive, clean.
Rt. 2 North - Nice residential area, nice golf course - road could use some work.
Rt. 2 South - Plant ruins the area, could be painted or removed. Nice smooth roadway. Park at the Marina could be improved by adding more equipment - nice area - nice pavilions. Band stand nice addition to the area. Jack & Jill preschool very cute!
- ⊗ Positive - Bridge entrance and gateway. Rows of trees and landscapes. Nice buildings.
Negative - oil refinery and tanks.

1. (a) Driving...comments on business: evaluate the downtown business area. (Signs, appearance, size, etc.)

- ⊗ Route 2 N and S both opens to a very clean, accessible four lane. Very nice appearance to community (exception is an old antique shop - looks junky). Bridge from Ohio - very attractive. Rt. 16 - great view, difficult entry.
- 4 Most signs looked good - some needed a little repair. Marina area looked pretty well kept. Preschool - very nice - pleasant to the eye.
- 4 Most signs are in good condition - Several that are eye catching. Downtown area has the potential to be quite attractive. Buildings are in need of a little TLC. Variety of stores.
- 4 Antique & Collectible place looked bad. Other shops, restaurants, stores looked nice.

c. welcome signs (at entrances)

- ⊗ Seem to be more about events than “*Community Welcome*” - a big billboard or Welcome Board.
- ⊗ I did not notice any welcome signs.
- Q Need to improve - you have some very attractive entrances to your community.

d. direction signs to parks, schools, hospitals/clinics, attractions, services (i.e. police), etc.

- ⊗ This area could use some attention. Four-lane opens things up well, but maybe lessens local identity.
- ⊗ Eyesore on Bills & 2nd.
- ⊗ Need more - have some very nice parks with Pleasant and Middle Island, as well as, Marina area, All have some very attractive things to attract, but all likewise have tremendous potential to take ideas, additions, spruce-ups, etc...to the next level - work on trails and picnic areas on Middle Island - work on trails and shelter areas in Pleasant Parks hillside area. Overall - very nice parks, but much more potential.

4. Driving...comments on industrial park/area: Sign well defined...busy...growing...new...etc.

- ⊗ Industrial Park developing well. Maybe needs signs a mile or less out. (i.e. “Entering Industrial Park” or some advanced notice). Old Refinery remains an unsolved problem (visually and economically)... this deserves a major emphasis.
- 4 Industrial Site - good access to a main route. Also, train tracks that run right through.

5. Driving...comments on schools:

- ⊗ H.S. and fields look well-maintained and neat. Middle School at Belmont...attractive.
- ⊗ Very clean around them, looked like they might be a little old but well kept.
- 4 Schools appear to be in descent shape considering the age.

⊗ Nice school - attractive - nice setting.

6. *Driving...comments on parks. play grounds. athletic facilities. etc:*

⊗ Park, pool, baseball field, etc... Very good asset for community. Upkeep of park shows need of financial support...large area is great, but expensive - needs attention.

⊗ Pool area nice - amphitheater needs work on backdrop. Park road a little washed out - horse shoe pit nice. ,

⊗ Nicer park - could use some more equipment. Kept up nicely. Back Drop of Amphitheater could use some work. Pool is nice and nicely landscaped. Pavilion is a nice addition. Nice football and softball fields.

⊗ Very nice parks, but with great potential to take them to the next level.

7. *Driving...comments on other:*

a. *hospitals/clinics*

⊗ Professional Building very nice... found by accident... needs major signs.

⊗ None

⊗ None noticed

b. *billboards/advertising*

⊗ Seemed normal...nothing unusual noted. Political season was on.

⊗ None

⊗ Did not see any billboards.

⊗ Didn't notice much so maybe you need some to say there is something happening here.

c. *Other*

⊗ St. Mary's is very clean and the drive is very scenic (minus the refinery).

IV. Walking Tour Questions:

1. Walking around...comments of businesses (physical part): Appearance, displays, signs, etc.

- 4** Business area is older...some have nice renovation...some need attention. Some have clear business signs. Several have no clear identification until you enter, or look in. The unique train track through the center of town is a focus for the business area. Some businesses are named for the railroad. The main business area seems to be semi-occupied, but there is much new development scattered a block or two from the main street.
- ⊗ Buildings are in need of some revitalization - town has potential.
- ⊗ Nice shops, stores, restaurants. Some stores need to have larger signs to identify themselves.
Fireside Restaurant - nice, good community reputation as town's nicest - facility is nice banquet room has beautiful wall of pictures with spotlights. However, need to replace non-content photos with area sites and attractions. Photos to inform people of what's in the area.

2. Walking around...comments on people: Were they friendly. did they know answers to questions. did they try to help. appearance, etc.

- ⊗ Very friendly people. Very accommodating and willing to share where not totally knowledgeable...directed me to good sources. Business people were neat, clean and very personable...did meet one or two unconcerned.
- o** People were friendly and helpful were open and talked when prompted.
- ⊗ We talked to several people during our visit and for the most part the people were very friendly. They were also very curious because in a small town where everybody knows everyone else they know we were visitors.
- ⊗ Very friendly - people have info if you talk to enough. Need to put info in nice visitors area attractions guide - include Bass Festival. Most seemed surprised when we asked for visitors guide as if to say why would you need one - weren't thinking of proximity to what there is to see and do in the area and how that helps bring customers.

3. Community information: comments on.....

a. community brochure (tourist type)

- ⚙ More business oriented than tourist.
- 4** I did not see one.
- ⚙ Picked up Pleasant County Family Resource Guide - basically businesses and organizations. No County Guide to show visitors close proximity to area attractions, sites and events.

b. business/attractions brochures or directory

- 4** Good county resource
- ⚙ Community resource brochure that listed the area agencies and businesses. Also listed phone numbers - this would be handy.
- ⚙ No one knew of one.
Found some history and info. Book on 150 year sesquicentennial “Ring the Bells Again” - a lot of ads and not all that much info.
No brochures of area attractions and sites to show close proximity to the rest of the world.
New resource guide mentioned in 3a above is pretty informative.

*c. community profile (demographic, industrial **type** information for prospective business people, etc.*

- ⚙ Some people provided good information others showed limited interest. Actual chamber members (when located) were very helpful..and proud.

d. map

- 4** Yes...included in Resource Guide
- 4** Small map in resource guide as an insert - not much info on it county-wide to show location of sites, attractions, events - available within guide and maps framed and displayed at area offices and businesses.

e. other (i.e. bulletin/notice tourism, kiosks, etc.)

- ⊗ Bass Festival sign at bridge ..noticed tourism potential is great...needs more emphasis. Island and Railroad are great sources.
- ⊗ County development office or other entity should have a coordinated advisory group or board of advisors with economic Development & Tourism combined to focus on assets and potential opportunities. What needs to be put in place. Should meet monthly at least to brain storm ideas ,at first -
 - Advisory Board or Community Development Board
 - County Development Director County & Regionally minded
 - Mayors
 - Tourism director or rep. with interest
 - Historical Society rep
 - Commissioners rep.
 - Business & Industry
 - Parks & Recreation
 - Banking
 - Extension office
 - Retail Merchants(Centralized offices on at least visitors guide and other info available at all offices).

4. City Hall...describe your visit:

a. appearance of facility, including signing

- 4 Clear sign on front (flat sign not extended. Very nice yard (park) area beside City Hall.
- 4 I thought the court house was very clean-bathroom and all
- ⊗ Seemed very basic.
- 4 Nice facility - clerk very knowledgeable and friendly. (However she didn't have the new resource guides)

b. helpfulness of staff

- 4 City clerk was very friendly and knowledgable...but did not have the Resource Guide.
- ⊗ The staff (Sue Morgan to be exact) from Clerk of Courts was very friendly and helpful. She told us a lot about the town.

⚙ Very friendly and willing to help

c. other

○ *City Hall - looked inside - looked cluttered*

5. Chamber of Commerce...describe your visit.

a. did people know where it was (or who to refer you to)?

⚙ New Chamber just organized. No marked office yet... found temporary location.

⚙ Did not visit chamber of commerce.

⚙ Was not easy to find

b. comment on information available

⚙ Community Foundation is a great asset.

○ No visitors Guide for your county. Visitors guides are good for local buy in of what you have and why you promote to bring in customer for businesses.

c. comment of staff

d. other (hours, appearance, locations, etc.)

6. Other stuff.....

a. public restrooms (available, condition, etc.)

○ Park on riverfront very nice, has restrooms, parking, boat ramp.

⚙ Didn't use any. Used restroom in Fireside restaurant and ate there too.

4 Only used restroom at the courthouse, which were clean.

b. pay phones (working, phonebook intact, etc.)

4 Saw a few...didn't check them.

⚙ Didn't see.

⚙ Did not notice any.

c. parking

⚙ Parking seemed adequate...our visit was a rainy day, not much traffic. Downtown may be difficult where trains come thru.

V. WRAP UP

A. Using your "senses"...

1. What does the community TASTE like? (Specialty bakery/restaurant, etc.)

⊗ A pleasant, small-town atmosphere. Serves local community well, trying to improve...has usual needs of growth and need for economic development.

4 Didn't notice any specialty shops. Taste like a hamburger - basic hamburger.

Basically, I thought St. Mary's was a nice clean town with friendly people. They have the basics that a town needs for its people. I think a few more shops - clothing, novelty type would be nice. We had a very rainy cool day to visit so perhaps it would have been even better had the sun shined.

Even though there were several stores their merchandise was limited.

I was impressed with the overall cleanliness and lack of trash from one end of the tour to the other.

⊗ Popcorn - minus the extra butter and salt.

⊗ Good variety of small restaurants, fast food, pizza, etc... Friendly people - good service.

St. Marys, WV

A cooperative project of Ohio State
University Extension and West
Virginia University Extension

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Introduction

- o The First Impressions Program is designed to gather data and impressions in support of ongoing community planning and goal setting efforts
- It does this by:

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Introduction (cont.)

- Evaluating the success of development initiatives
- o Identifying how to strengthen community services
- o Creating an enhanced image to the outside world
- o Focusing development efforts

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Team Members

- David Cater, Director, Noble County Travel and Tourism Program, Age-40's
- Cindy Fogle, Cashier, Farmer's and Merchants Bank/Leadership Noble, Age-40's

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Team Members (cont.)

- Jerry Russell, Retired Superintendent, Noble Local Schools, Age-60's
- Misty Wells, Employment Services Interviewer, Noble Co. Dept. of Jobs and Family Services/Leadership Noble, Age-20's

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Conditions

- Weather: Mostly Cloudy, heavy non-continuous, rain showers.

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Expectations

- 2 of 4 had never been there
- Believed there would be a lot of similarities to Caldwell
- Small, proud, self contained community

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Five Minute Impression

- Neat and clean
- Businesses well marked
- Good four-lane access
- Could miss downtown if not looking for
- The old refinery is a problem — at least part of the tanks!
- Antique and Collectible was an eye-sore

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Five Minute Impression

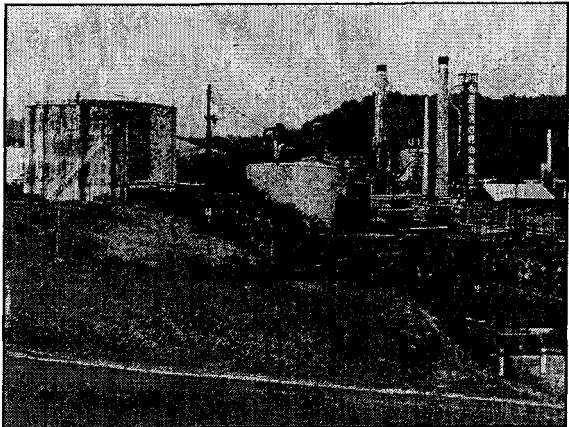
- Well kept homes
- Nice mix of businesses
- Train through downtown is attraction
- Dramatic entrance from Ohio via bridge
- Vacant storefronts in downtown an issue

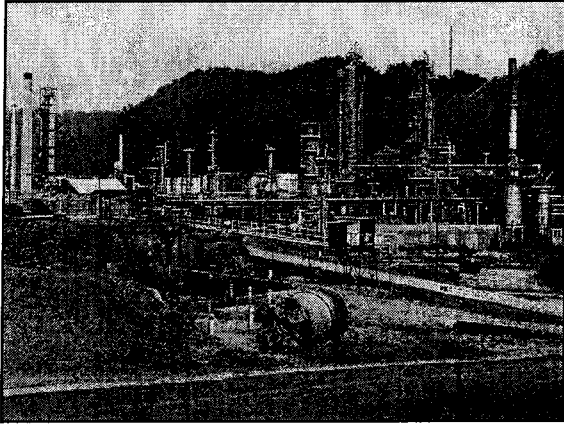
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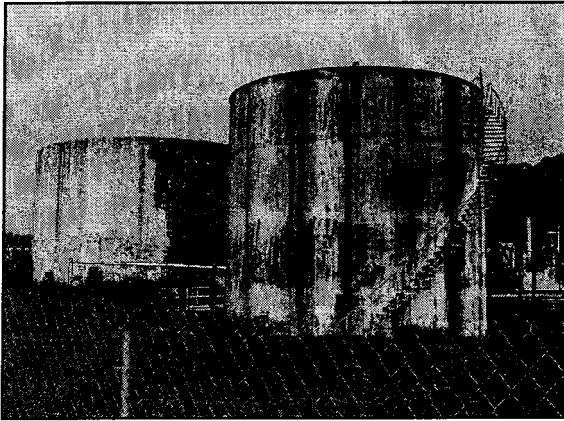
Five Minute Impression

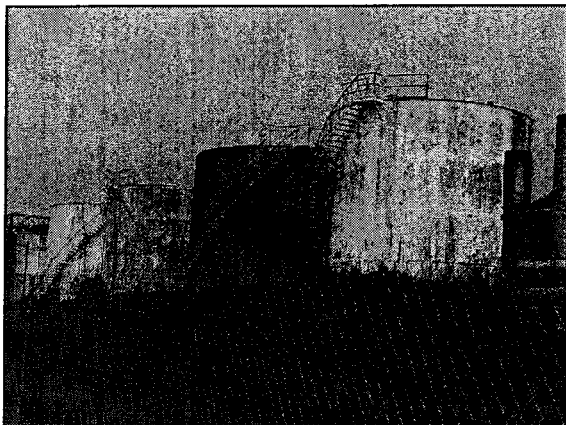
- Suggestions for refinery
- Great potential. Paint tanks with murals
"Welcome to St. Marys"
- Chair lift to top of tanks for view of town
- Create a park, picnic tables, etc
- Create alternatives to tearing it down

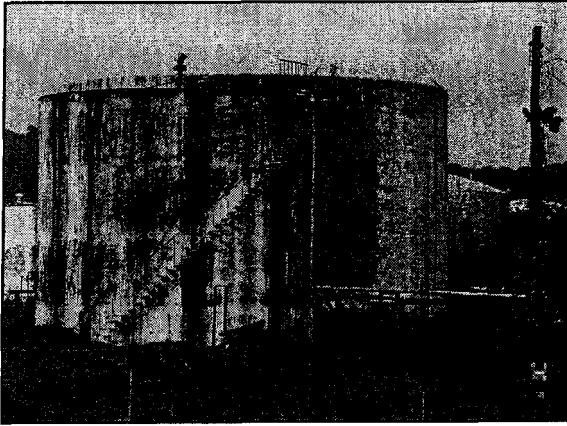
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Entrances

- Rt. 16. Nice Homes. Scenic. Clean. Needs mowed. Some trash.
- Rt. 2 North. Very nice. Plant trees to trailer park. Nice golf course. Could use road work.
- Rt. 2 South. Good road. Issue of refinery.

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Comments on Businesses

- Very nice appearance to community
- Most signs looked good
- Some buildings need TLC
- Pre-school (Jack and Jill) looked very nice
- Nice variety of stores
- Issue of antique shop. Distracts from area

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Comments on Businesses

- Downtown appears old. Ready for planned upgrade
- Consider similar sign styles
- Consider period street lighting
- Consider underground utilities

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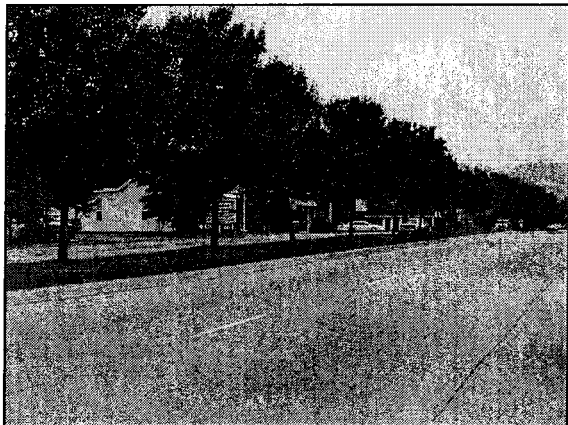
Comments on Residential

- Most homes nice and well kept
- Nice mix of values
- Are some that need work
- Even most of the trailers appeared well

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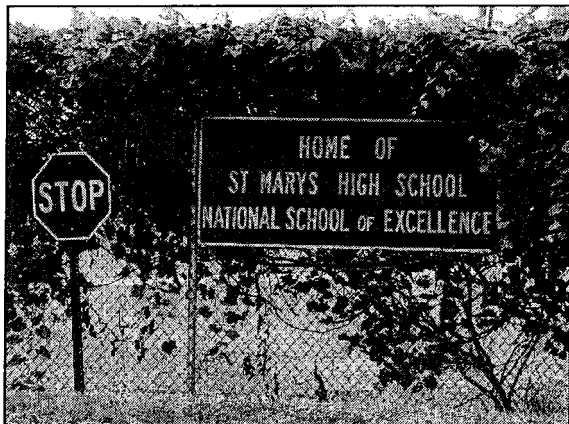




Signs

- National School of Excellence needs mowed around
- Need special signs to direct to library, island, etc
- Welcome signs to community

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Industrial Park

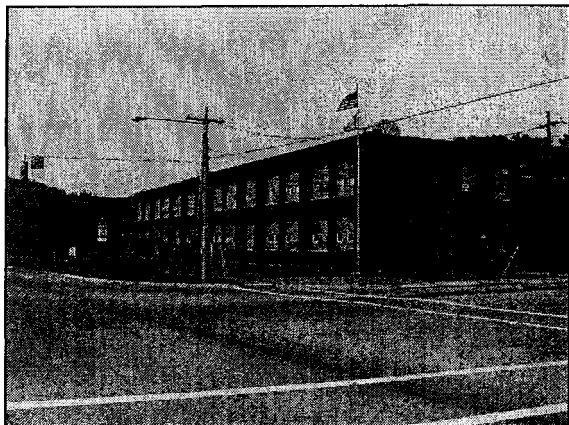
- Appears *to* be developing well
- Think about signs a mile or so out on Rt. 2
- Nice site, river, rail, and road

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Schools

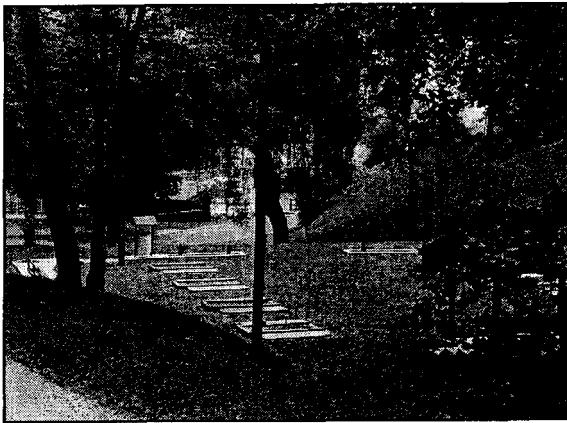
- H.S. and fields look well maintained
- Belmont Middle School attractive
- PRT/Parkersburg WVU nice addition
- Decent shape considering the age

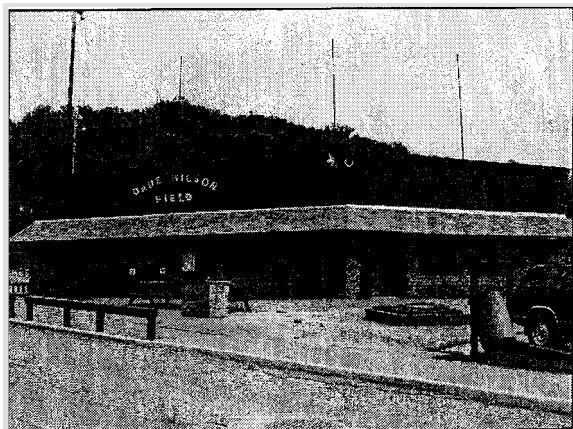
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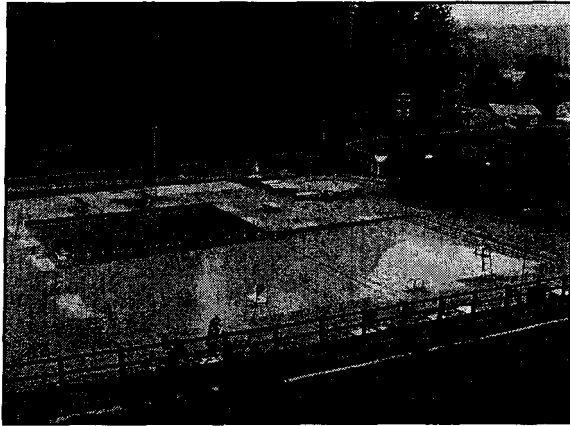


- Hillside park large, looks as if it needs financial support
- Pool area and ball park area very nice
- Amphitheatre could use some attention
- Nice horse shoe area
- Nice stage area at manna

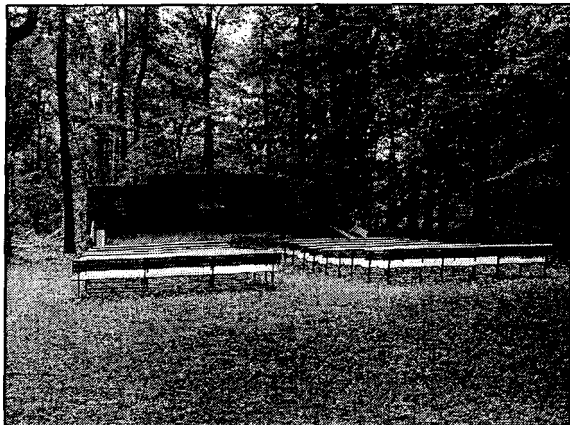
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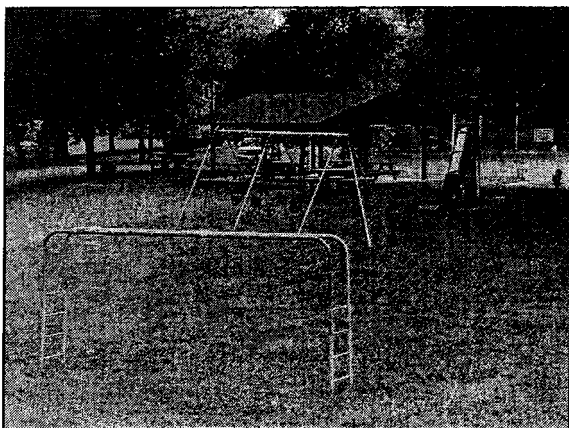


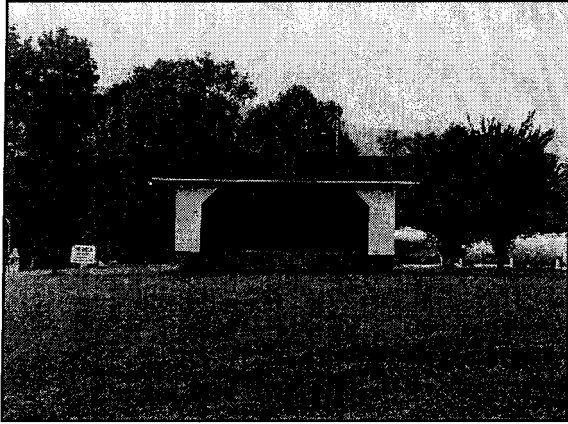












Other Driving Comments

- Hospitals/Clinics—found Professional Building by mistake — Signs?

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Walking Tour/Businesses

- Several have no identification until you walk in. Signage?
- Railroad track is unique focus to a downtown, capitalize on it!
- Is development on Rt. 2 at the expense of downtown?
- Consider having restaurants have local pictures on walls

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People

- Very friendly. Accommodating. Helpful
- Neat, clean
- People were curious — they knew we were visitors
- Most seemed surprised when asked for a visitor's guide. Questioned why St. Marys would need one?

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Community Brochure

- More business oriented than tourist
- Couldn't find one
- Could only find a "Pleasants County Resources Guide"

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Attraction Brochure

- o Consider a guide that lists area agencies and businesses
- o Found history book "Ring the Bells Attraction"
- o Couldn't find written info, but chamber members were helpful — and proud!
- o A large map would be nice. Maybe framed on wall of some businesses

City Hall/Court House

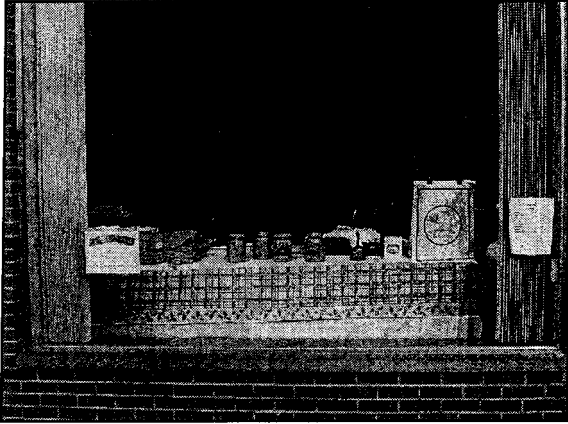
- Clear sign on front
- Nice park beside
- o Nice mural on wall, but obscured by trees
- o Didn't go in, but looked cluttered inside
- o Court House Clerk (Sue Morgan) knowledgeable and friendly, not aware of new resource guide
- o Courthouse neat and clean

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Chamber of Commerce

- New to community, found temporary office
- Did not visit
- Hard to find
- Found good info on Community Foundation there

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Other Stuff

- o Public restrooms — Looked nice on Marina (from outside)
- o Didn't use. Used at Fireside Restaurant
- Used at Court House, clean
- Pay phones — Saw but didn't use
- Didn't see
- Parlung — seemed adequate

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Wrap Up

- Impressed with overall cleanliness and lack of trash
- Nice clean town with friendly people
- o Have the basics that a town needs for its people

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“Taste” of St. Marys

- A hamburg—a basic hamburg
- Popcorn—minus the salt and butter

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